THE NEWARK HOLY STONES: THE HISTORY OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMEDY

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Abstract

The Newark Holy Stones are a series of fraudulent artifacts inscribed with Hebrew lettering that were claimed to have been found in Licking County, Ohio beginning in 1860. After scientific review, they all have been revealed to be forgeries or hoaxes. In recent years, some of these objects have featured prominently in various revivals of pseudoscientific claims. The authors here outline the circumstances of their discovery, reasons for asserting their fraudulent nature, and suggest some of the agendas that have led to a renewal of their consideration today. Finally, we consider a more recent discovery, which has become linked to the Holy Stones debate that we use to demonstrate both the absurd lengths to which proponents of such claims will go to advance their agendas, and the appeal of such oddities to modern contrarians.

> "I'm not convinced from this 'History of an Archaeological Tragedy' that it really was a tragedy; in some ways it clearly resembles a comedy..." (From an anonymous peer reviewer of Robert Altutz's manuscript submitted to the *Journal of the Scientific Laboratories, Denison University*, dated 3 July 1978)

The Newark Holy Stones (Figure 1) are five carved stone objects sharing at least five things in common. They are engraved with Hebrew letters; they reportedly were found in association with ancient American Indian earthworks in the vicinity of Newark, Ohio; they were found within a relatively short period of time between June 1860 and August 1867; by 1881, at the latest, archaeologists and historians had dismissed all of them as forgeries; and in 1980, Robert Alrutz, a professor of biology, declared in a peer-reviewed scientific journal that they had been prematurely condemned as fraudulent and warranted a more in depth study. As a direct result of his reassessment, the Holy Stones have featured prominently in a revival of pseudoscientific claims, including a 2010 documentary on the *Lost Civilizations of North America*, which was featured on the Glenn Beck show on the Fox News Channel (Lepper et al, 2011), and a 2013 episode of *America Unearthed* on the History Channel.

In this paper, we review the circumstances of the discovery of each of the Holy Stones, discuss why archaeologists at the time concluded they were not what they appeared to be, present the

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evidence that demonstrates they are forgeries, establish the historical context that provided the motivation for the forgeries, and explain why, in spite of this unequivocal evidence, the Holy Stones continue to be promoted as evidence that ancient Israelites rather than the indigenous American Indians built the monumental earthworks of the Ohio Valley (Lepper and Gill 2000, 2008; Lepper et al. 2011).

Discoveries

In late June, 1860, David Wyrick, the Licking County surveyor and an avid antiquarian, conducted an investigation into a small depression associated with one of the small earthen enclosures at the Newark Earthworks (Figure 2). In the course of his excavations he encountered a carved and polished plumb bob-shaped stone that had Hebrew letters engraved on each of its four faces (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The two most important of the Newark Holy Stones and associated artifacts. From left to right: two halves of the carved box that contained the Decalogue Stone when it was first discovered; a small stone bowl found with the Decalogue Stone and made from the same material as the box; the Decalogue Stone; the Keystone. (Ben Croghan, Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum)

In spite of its resemblance to a plumb bob, it somehow became known as the Keystone. The Rev. John Winspeare McCarty, the local Episcopal minister, translated the four inscriptions as "the Laws of Jehovah," "the Word of the Lord," "the Holy of Holies," and "the King of the Earth."

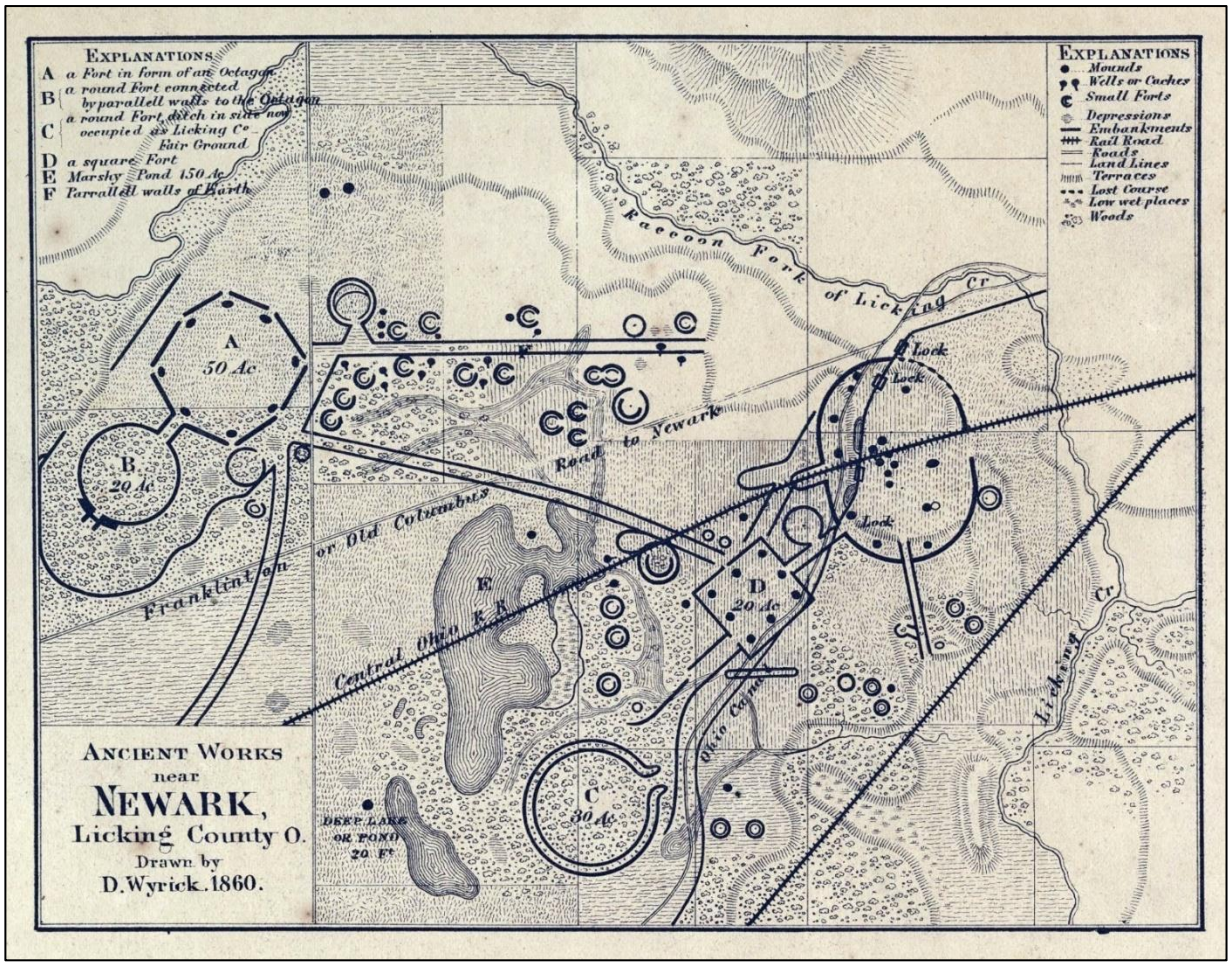

Figure 2. The Newark Earthworks as surveyed and mapped by David Wyrick. The Keystone was found in association with one of the small circular earthworks located east of the Octagon Earthworks (upper left) and south of the parallel walls leading from the octagonal enclosure towards the oval enclosure (upper right).

Wyrick went to McCarty for assistance because they knew each other well; and McCarty was, quite probably, the only person in the community who could translate Hebrew text.

Charles Whittlesey, one of the foremost archaeologists in Ohio at that time, happened to be in Newark when Wyrick made his discovery. In a presentation he gave for the Fire Lands Historical Society in 1865, he recalled that, while some denied the authenticity of the Keystone, he had "no such doubt" (Whittlesey 1866:14). But because of "its position so near the surface" he judged it was a historic artifact not related to the builders of the earthworks.

Wyrick continued his explorations in the region and, just four months later on November 1, 1860, he made another remarkable discovery at the Reservoir Stone Mound located just over seven miles south of Newark (Lepper 2016). This had been the largest ancient stone structure north of Mexico until much of it was hauled away to provide stone to stabilize the banks of the Licking County Reservoir, which is now Buckeye Lake. Wyrick and a team of men began excavating in a previously investigated small earthen mound that was one of several such mounds that had been buried by the massive stone mound. They focused their efforts on a clay layer in which a wooden

"sarcophagus" had been found (Lepper 2016). In this layer, beneath where the so-called sarcophagus had been, Wyrick uncovered a small stone box that contained an intricately carved slab of black limestone covered with archaic-looking Hebrew letters and a representation of a man in flowing robes (Figure 1). When translated, once again by the Rev. McCarty, the inscription was found to include the entire Ten Commandments; and the robed figure was identified as Moses. It therefore became known as the Decalogue Stone. John Nicol, one of the participants in the excavation, later accused Wyrick of perpetrating a hoax (*Missing Link* 1867). In 1870, Whittlesey, without referencing Nicol's accusations, expressed his opinion that both of the Holy Stones were "Archaeological Frauds": "When Moses and the Ten Commandments appeared, Wyrick's character as an imposter was soon established" (1870:4). (The question of whether Wyrick was a perpetrator or a victim of the imposture has been discussed in previous publications [e.g., Lepper and Gill 2000].)

Inscribed Head: 10 May 1865

Nicol was subsequently involved in the discovery of two additional, but even more dubious, Holy Stones. In May, 1865, Nicol, in company with Joel Dennis, Thomas Sutton and some others, conducted excavations into a mound on the property of George A. Wilson about two and a half miles east of Newark (Alrutz 1980:31). During the excavations, they uncovered a small sculpture of a human head with five Hebrew letters engraved across the forehead. Huston McCulloch, a professor of Economics at the Ohio State University who agreed with Alrutz that the Keystone and Decalogue Stone were authentic, observed that the inscription consisted of the Hebrew letters that corresponded to the English characters J, H, N, C, L, or J. H. NiCoL, thus proving that the Inscribed Head was a deliberate prank (Lepper 1991).

Cooper Stone: 11 June 1865

In the following month, a Mr. Cooper, about whom little is known, visited the George A. Wilson mound and discovered yet another Holy Stone apparently lying on the disturbed surface of the ground (Alrutz 1980:33-35). Dr. John Wilson, another local antiquarian, speculated that "it must have been thrown out" during the previous excavation and not recognized for what it was at that time (quoted in Alrutz 1980:33).

The Cooper Stone is a complicated mélange of human faces and animal forms with five Hebrew letters inscribed across the forehead of one of the faces. The inscription also corresponds to Nicol's name transliterated into Hebrew (Lepper 1991). Whittlesey (1881:132) noted that Nicol had been "so much annoyed" that "more credit was given to the statements of Wyrick" than to his claim that Wyrick had planted the Decalogue Stone where it was found, that "he fabricated two or more specimens, to show how easily people could be deceived. He [Nicol] said that two of them were afterwards found in a mound on the land of Mr. S. [*sic*; should be G.] A. Wilson, in Madison Township, Licking County."

Johnson Stone: 13 August 1867

The Johnson Stone was found by N. Roe Bradner, Jr., a Philadelphia physician with antiquarian interests, within a cranium that had been given to him by David Johnson, an avid collector from nearby Coshocton. Johnson had excavated the skull from the Reservoir Stone Mound, not far from where the Decalogue Stone had been found. The Johnson Stone was a small, wedge-shaped stone inscribed with characters similar to those found on the Decalogue Stone and made from the same black limestone (Bradner 1875). Johnson shipped the cranium to Bradner apparently unaware that it might have contained such a prize, since he had undertaken his excavations in the express hope of finding just such another Holy Stone. Bradner claimed that when he unpacked the fragile cranium, it came apart revealing the stone in "the midst of the dirt which the skull contained" (Bradner 1874:4). No translation of the Hebrew inscription has ever been offered, although Alrutz (1980:36) noted that Bradner "had shown his stone to a Rabbi who said it was a forgery."

In a letter written in 1879, Johnson informed Whittlesey (1881:133) that the skull, which supposedly contained the small inscribed stone, "was taken from the centre mound, or altar, at about four feet from the surface" (see Lepper [2016] for more information concerning what is known about the internal structure of the Reservoir Stone Mound). Whittlesey (1881:133) found the idea that the stone object might actually have been contained within the skull "incredible." He concluded his investigation of the Holy Stones in evident and understandable exasperation:

> How many inscribed stones were fabricated by Nichols [sic] and Wyrick no one knows, and therefore it cannot be predicted how many may be found hereafter. I have delayed this publication hoping to procure more definite information. Everyone appreciates the difficulty of substantiating a negative, in a matter where there are so many motives in favor of concealment (Whittlesey 1881:133).

Epigraphy

Epigraphy, palaeography, morphology, typography: studying the inscriptions on the Newark Holy Stones, requires calling on all of these disciplines and more. There are 29 characters on the Keystone, and 256 on the Decalogue Stone (plus two more symbols that are a sort of punctuation). The inscriptions, and the Hebrew texts they represent, are the real claim to significance for these objects. The forms of the objects are absolutely unprecedented for the Middle Woodland contexts in which there were claimed to have been found, but it is the Hebrew letters and words engraved upon them that have kept them in public debate for over a century and a half.

The problem with the Hebrew lettering on the two objects in question is that they do not hold up under the lens of common sense. A microscopic analysis of tool marks within the letters might give us more insight into how the inscriptions were made and who made them, but the idea that, whether in 1860 or today, we're looking at ancient Hebrew somehow incorporated into the material culture of two thousand years ago in Ohio, is not remotely credible.

As was noted by most of the first observers in the summer of 1860, the four phrases on the Keystone are carved in stone, but the 29 letters are shaped exactly like typeface Hebrew. The serifs and strokes of each individual letter are not only more contemporary than any ancient form of the Hebrew alphabet, they seem to be an attempt to precisely replicate how those letters look in a print version of the Hebrew scriptures. That puts the inscription, if not the object, somewhere this side of Gutenberg, later than 1440 at any rate. Additionally, the first Hebrew words printed in North America do not appear until 1640.

There is something else even more fundamentally wrong about the inscription. If you look at the original object, not the slightly tidied up engravings so often shown in reference to the Keystone, you only need a passing knowledge of Hebrew to notice something odd. It is a language written from right to left, and so the letters are arranged: yet each phrase is more or less jammed over to the right. It is impossible to notice this and not realize that the phrases are carved from left to right, with some improvement between the wider, flatter sides and the two narrower edges in spacing out the phrase to be carved. "Devor YHWH" is in all likelihood the last side to be carved, as the only one that does not crush what should be the first letter of the phrase into and over the rounded corner of the top of the stone.

In fact, many advocates of the antiquity of the Decalogue Stone are fairly quick to join Whittlesey and other early skeptics in throwing the Keystone back into the dirt from whence it came. The early consensus is rarely challenged even today: the Keystone alphabet is too modern to be ancient, the object has overtones of Masonic influence, and was found fairly near the surface, so if it is an actual artifact (versus a planted fabrication) it is a lost piece of regalia from early American Freemasonry.

So from early summer to late autumn, from the primary and nomination season for the political parties of 1860 to the portentous federal election on Tuesday, November 6, David Wyrick continued his mound explorations. On November 1st, he and several companions ventured south of Newark, to probe into the remnants of a previously excavated log tomb and the clay beneath it. He uncovered a stone box and within it was an object that has since been known as the Decalogue Stone. It has a bas-relief figure with three Hebrew letters boldly inscribed above it, and closer study after cleaning back in town revealed 253 more letters spelling out an edited form of the Ten Commandments, abridged from the Book of Exodus.

This Decalogue inscription, winding around the frame of the figure and across the other sides of the stone, was not a form of Hebrew that looked immediately familiar. In fact, the find, and especially the form of the letters, neatly answered the three concerns which swept aside the Keystone: it was found in a once deeply buried location, the Hebrew alphabet used was ancient in appearance, and the stone's shape looked like nothing anyone had seen in a Masonic lodge meeting (Lepper and Gill 2000:25). This was a Hebrew inscription that had to be considered in the context of ancient America, before Columbus, nearer to the time of Moses. The Decalogue Stone and its inscription, however, have some of the same problems as the Keystone.

It is a matter of no little interest that if the Keystone is more easy to dismiss than the Decalogue Stone, then why is it that, aside from the fact that one man found both only four months apart, they also both share nearly the exact same primary dimensions? Different types of stone result in two

different colors, and the general outline of each is different, but the breadth and thickness of the two are identical, and the length of the Keystone is identical to the length of the Decalogue Stone from top to the "opening" at its base, with another inch of handle extending below. Holding up the two next to each other, they certainly have the appearance and dimensions of two objects from the same workshop, not items vastly distant in time.

Having noted that interesting coincidence, to understand why the Decalogue version of Hebrew does not hold up as ancient any more than the Keystone's did, you do not need to know much Hebrew, but just think about English typography and calligraphy of some two centuries ago. You have doubtless seen a copy of the 1789 U.S. Bill of Rights, and perhaps wondered a bit at the inscription "Congrefs of the United States." Old English documents from the Revolutionary era back through John Milton and before used a convention of the "long S" which today looks to us like "f." Our usual "s" was then more of a terminal form, the way you wrote the letter at the end of a word. In that bookhand a scribe might write "fuccefs" for success. It looks like a typo to us, a mistaken spelling of "loft" instead of "lost," but in the late 1700s most anyone who was literate would have seen the usage for what it was, the "long S" and "terminal S" used in their usual places.

Hebrew has terminal forms of some letters as well. In the 21 letters of the Decalogue alphabet that are used in the 253 letter inscription, there are a number of places where the oddly-shaped "square Hebrew" of the Decalogue letterforms have errors. For example, the wrong letter is used for the Hebrew word in the Exodus text. A majority of these erroneous letters occur either at the end of words, where a terminal form in typeface Hebrew looks like another standard form (terminal Kaph and standard Daleth the chief example), or where the letters simply look similar, especially by lamp or candlelight. Waw and Daleth, for example, when the simple Waw is next to some letters, can look at first glance like a Daleth's curve.

The problem with saying, as some have, that these are simply an epigraphic form of scribal errors made by an artisan who is doing the best they can in less than ideal circumstances, is that the errors fall consistently into a pattern. When letters that are not similar between the supposedly ancient Decalogue alphabet and a more modern typeface Hebrew are switched, then the errors become, not mistakes of expression, but obvious transpositions. Even McCullough, in his 1992 transcription, which he wrote to make the case for the antiquity and authenticity of the Decalogue Stone, notes in one case "the error could only have been made when the text was written in standard Hebrew letters, where waw and daleth look very much alike, and not in the Ohio Decalogue alphabet, where these letters cannot be confused." (1992:62).

McCullough had already noticed the pattern with word endings of the transposed terminal forms, saying "a few other discrepancies point instead to someone's having slavishly copied a standard Hebrew text without understanding all the words." (1992:60) Dismissing the errors in orthography as something similar to terminal forms in the Dead Sea Scrolls, he moves on to propose that some of the errors could point to roots in ancient Hebrew grammar.

However, the transpositions on the Decalogue Stone are not so easily dismissed. First, because in the paleo-Hebrew and "square Hebrew" and in the Aramaic of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there are not the same sorts of terminal forms (Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Library 2021). As for ancient Hebrew grammar, we did not have enough Hebrew knowledge to rule out that the error pattern on

word endings might not possibly be some obscure grammatical exception to the rules, and not the simpler explanation that they were mistakes made by a modern person, transcribing letters from a printed Hebrew book, transposing one letter at a time into a made-up Decalogue alphabet.

In order to gain further insight into these issues, we contacted Frank Moore Cross, Hancock Professor of Hebrew at Harvard University, and in 1991 the leading American scholar of Hebrew in general, and the Dead Sea Scrolls in particular. Cross (1991) confirmed that our understanding was "certainly correct." Moreover, he noted at least three additional places where the only reason the erroneous letter in Decalogue terms would have been carved was if the carver was starting with a modern Hebrew printed page.

At this point, our study of the Newark Holy Stones began to shift. If the Keystone is generally conceded to be modern in manufacture, and the physical parallels between the two artifacts suggest a similar origin for the Decalogue Stone, which the analysis of the inscription confirms is a modern forgery, then our question is no longer about "If the Holy Stones were a hoax," but "Why?" We follow the early Ohio archaeologist Matthew Canfield Read (1892:105) who wrote, "Such forgeries will always in some way represent the ideas of the time of the forgery."

Historical Context

"If these are a hoax, why would the perpetuator go to such extremes to make his fraud?" (Robert Alrutz [1980:47])

The Newark Holy Stones, if genuine, would provide a definitive answer to the most consequential question in nineteenth century American science, religion, and politics: the question of which of the so-called human races counted as truly human; and, more immediately, was it morally defensible to enslave Sub-Saharan Africans (Lepper and Gill 2000). Supporters of monogenesis, the Biblically-based doctrine that all humans were sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, were opposed to slavery. Supporters of polygenesis argued that the varied human "races" were actually separate species and therefore it was acceptable to enslave Sub-Saharan Africans, or remove, by any means necessary, American Indians from their homelands.

Josiah Nott, an Alabama physician, was one of the principal proponents of polygenesis. He argued that the Biblical account of Adam and Eve was a fairy tale. Scientific exploration of America's mounds showed they were not just older than Moses, they were older even than Adam. Supporters of monogenesis who argued that American Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel were wrong, because the ancient Hebrews were as ignorant of the world on this side of the Atlantic Ocean "as we are of the geography of the moon" (Nott 1849:57).

The Newark Holy Stones, if authentic, would prove Nott wrong. American Indians and, by extension, America's enslaved Sub-Saharan Africans, must then be acknowledged to be children of Adam and Eve. If this was, indeed, the intended purpose of the Holy Stones, then the fact that the Keystone and Decalogue Stone appeared during the final days of the presidential campaign of 1860 was no coincidence.

The significance of the Holy Stones to this debate is indicated by two divergent responses to their discovery. Thomas Wallbridge, a member of the Canadian Institute (now the Royal Canadian Institute for Science), was a proponent of polygenesis. Writing in 1861, he acknowledged that "the announcement of the Newark discoveries had given a momentary exultation to those theorists who count the aborigines of America so many descendants from the rebellious Isrealites [sic]" (Wallbridge 1861:10-11). He argued, however, that the scientific evidence clearly showed that "the Indian is an original type… Like the plants and animals of the new world, differing in species from those of the old" (Wallbridge 1861:12).

Bradner, the discoverer of the Johnson Stone, was a champion of monogenesis. He used his announcement of that discovery, before an international audience in 1873, to declare his support for the Unity of Man: "With sacred evidence that the human race sprung from one man, with a continued history of the lives of themselves and their ancestors, with the record that one of the early tribes had been separated from them and lost; and, most singular and strange, in the course of time they find in this new land relics of great age, accompanied by inscriptions in their own original language" (Bradner 1875:196).

The interwoven debates over monogenesis, polygenesis, and the Holy Stones continued until they were overtaken by historical events. The American Civil War ended slavery in America; and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, rendered the debate between polygenesis and monogenesis largely irrelevant. As a result, the Holy Stones became not only unhelpful in fulfilling the purpose for which they had been created, they had become potentially dangerous to the perpetrators if the fraud were to be exposed. So, expect for the occasional isolated references to them, such as Bradner's, they lapsed into obscurity – at least until Alrutz once more brought them into the limelight. Why he chose to do so is a bit of a mystery, but he was an unapologetic Creationist, so it may be that he saw the Holy Stones as a means of validating the Fundamentalist view of Biblical history. If the Stones were authentic relics of antiquity, then it could be argued that the American Indians were descendants of Semitic peoples who had arrived in the Americas less than 4,000 years ago.

This later phase of public awareness around the Newark Holy Stones may well have helped obscure the particular agenda we infer for their manufacture in 1860. In the last few decades, to argue that we are all directly descended from a Biblical Adam and Eve clearly signals a sort of religious fundamentalism almost always at odds with a scientific perspective. This can be confusing when looking back before Darwin at the state of academic science and particularly human biology before 1859: monogenesis, the view that all the races or types of humanity had a common ancestor, was associated with a "high view of Scripture," and also with the abolitionist movement opposed to slavery, while polygenesis, claiming a variety of origins for externally distinct human groups, was both the heart of the political and cultural defense of slavery, and also the mainstream scientific theory of the day. After the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, this script was flipped, and by the famous Oxford debate between Thomas Huxley and Bishop Wilberforce (also in 1860), the religious view came to be at odds with the now prevailing view of modern science, that all hominins of any sort were descended from a common ancestor.

It was this journey, from the fundamental assumptions of the pre-Civil War era supporting the 1857 Dred Scott decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that Sub-Saharan Africans "had no rights

which the white man was bound to respect; and that [they] might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery," to the modern scientific view of human unity definitively established by Charles Darwin, that we believe the Newark Holy Stones were meant to support. They provided objective proof of human unity for the scientific debate, while using a Biblical framework for doing so. The co-optation of the Holy Stones by modern fundamentalists to support an anti-scientific view of human origins and diffusion across the continents adds a confusing, if fascinating undercurrent to the uses of this unfortunate if well-intended hoax today.

Coda: The "Coin of Evia"

In 1985, Alrutz presented a paper about "The Newark Holy Stones" to a conference sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Collective Behavior and Memory that was held at Newark. It was subsequently published in the journal *Horus* (Alrutz 1986). As part of the paper, he described the discovery of "a small stone" that resembled a modern coin. Alrutz provided no measurements and his photographs do not include a scale. He indicated that the stone was found in 1969 by an Ohio Power employee while installing a pole near the East Main Street Bridge in Newark (Alrutz 1986). The stone had sculpted faces on each side and an inscription on one of the sides. Alrutz reported that the marine biologist and pseudo-epigraphist Barry Fell identified the object as "a copy of an Iberian trading piece" (Alrutz 1986).

Fell's own account, which he published in 1980 in his book *Saga America*, is rather different from Alrutz's. Fell (1980:122) stated the object was made from "baked ceramic," not stone, and was found "ninety years ago." He concluded that it was "a crude and barbarously executed American copy of an ancient bronze coin of Evia, depicting the face of the gorgon Medusa on one side, and (a travesty of) the head of Hercules on the other side" (Fell 1980:122). The two published accounts differ in important details. Is it made from stone or ceramic? Was it found in 1969 or 1880? It is unknown whether Fell ever handled, let alone saw the object in person; thus, Alrutz's account of the object's material and the circumstances of its discovery is more credible. Even if it is an authentic relic of antiquity, it has no context and neither Alrutz nor Fell suggests it was inscribed with Hebrew letters. Nevertheless, Alrutz included a discussion of this curious object in his paper on the Newark Holy Stones, so he believed that it was somehow related to and provided support for them. It is unknown where the object is today; but fortunately, the Alrutz papers at the Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum include detailed black and white photographs of both sides of the object (Figures 3 and 4), which have allowed co-author Marley to provide the following detailed analysis.

Fell (1980:123) claimed the object was a coin created by Celtiberian peoples living in Ohio during the late fourth or early third century BCE, and is therefore the "oldest known American coin." He identified the inscription, located to the right of the gorgon's head (Figure 3), as retrograde Iberian-Greek stating "ODACIS EVIOM," or "ODAKIS EBIOM" in Latin (1980:122-123). He further asserted that *Odacis* is the Iberian form of the ancient Greek word for "currency"; and *Eviom* is an alternative spelling for the Celtic city Evia, later renamed by the Romans as Salacia and now the modern town of Alcácer do Sal, Portugal (1980:122). The makers of this object, according to Fell (1980:123), must have been from Evia and reproduced this known coin type when they ran out of their original currency supplies while in North America. All of these claims

are entirely wrong and reveal a lack of knowledge about ancient Mediterranean material culture, language, iconography, geography, and history.

Every ancient Mediterranean society used metal currency, either ingots and/or coinage made of iron or precious metals. Prior to currency, these societies used a barter system; thus when they switched to currency, the coinage had to have an intrinsic value that would be worth trading. This concept is why the gold standard was used widely in modern times during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fell, therefore, was wrong in his claims that this object was a coin, let alone "the oldest known American coin," as the medium is entirely wrong.

Figure 3. "Coin of Evia" (inscription side). (Original photograph taken by Robert Alrutz. Courtesy, Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum.)

Figure 4. "Coin of Evia" (other side). (Original photograph taken by Robert Alrutz. Courtesy, Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum.)

Fell's interpretation of the text and understanding of the actual ancient coin type also are entirely wrong. Fell's (1980:122) claim that the "Coin of Evia" is a copy of a documented type of coin minted in Evia and dating to the third and second century BCE is not credible, because the images and text on the object do not match what are found on such coins.

Ancient coins in the Mediterranean were normally struck between dies, and while there could be some slight differences between coins, the overall imagery and text remained the same. There are indeed *Odacis* coin types from the Celtic city later known as Salacia; however, the "Coin of Evia" looks nothing like them. The actual coins follow two types.

On the first, the obverse has a bust of Hercules (sometime attributed to his Phoenician counterpart, Melqart), with a lion skin and club with "ODACIS.A" in Latin to the left: on the reverse are two tunas with "*Beuipo" in southern Iberian script between them (Pappa 2019:80;

Ripollès 2017: Plate 3; Ripollès and Sinner 2019:372; Mora Serrano 2011:76; Faria 1996:167; Faria 1989:82). The type can be exemplified by a 11 g copper alloy unit minted in the second century BCE in the British Museum (Meadows and Bagwell-Purefoy 2002:495; British Museum 2021) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Obverse (left) and reverse of the first Odacis coin type. Salacia (Braga, Minho), Portugal. 2nd century BCE. Copper alloy. 11 g. The British Museum, G.2018. (The Trustees of the British Museum 2021).

On the second type, the obverse has the bust of Hercules with a lion skin and club but with "ODA.A.S" along the edge; on the reverse are tunas and "*Beupio" along on the edge (Pappa 2019:80; Faria 1996:167; Faria 1989:82). The second type can be exemplified by a 6.7 g bronze minted in the second century BCE seen in Faria (1989:97) (Pappa 2019:80; Valverde 2004:249; Villaranga 2004:160-161). The "Coin of Evia" does not conform to either pattern as the iconography and text are entirely different.

The "Coin of Evia" has the image of a grotesque face and text on one side and an image of an old man on the other. Fell (1980:122) claimed that the old man is a depiction of Hercules, but this assertion is unfounded as none of Hercules' standard attributes, the club, lion skin, bow, sword, defined musculature, and a beard, are present. Representations of Hercules as an older man exist, but he is never depicted with the number of wrinkles seen on the man depicted on the Newark "coin," because he is said to have died a relatively young man. Therefore, there is no basis on which to identify the old man image on the Newark object as Hercules.

Fell's claim that the other image on the "Coin of Evia" is Medusa is similarly completely unfounded. The face has none of the standard attributes of Medusa that would allow it to be identified as her or even as a generic gorgon. Gorgons generally are shown with snakes as hair, thick eyebrows, wild/strange eyes (usually with pupils), a pig-like or bulbous nose, sharp teeth, and tongue sticking out. There is nothing about the image on the "Coin of Evia" that indicates it was intended to depict either Medusa or another gorgon. It is likely that Fell only identified the faces on the Newark artifact as Hercules and Medusa to provide support for his otherwise unfounded claim that the object was part of the *Odacis* coin type.

Fell's translation of the text on the "Coin of Evia" also is fatally flawed. The word *Odacis* is not the Iberian form of the Greek word for currency. *Nomisma* (νόμισμα) is the correct ancient Greek word for coin or currency (TLG 2021). The closest Greek word is *hodan* (ὁδᾶν) from the verb *hodaō (*ὁδάω), which means "to export or sell," and is known to have been used in Classical literature only six times: three times in Euripides' *Cyclops*, two times in Photius's *Lexicon,* and one time in Olympiodorus Diaconus' *Commentarii in Lamentationes* (TLG 2021). No conjugation of the word could result in it being spelled similarly to *odacis*. Furthermore, the word on the actual coin type is written in Latin, not ancient Greek, Greek-Iberian, or any Iberian language. Thus, Fell's (1980:122) claim that *Odacis* is the Iberian-Greek version of the word while *Odakis* is the Latin is not credible.

Actually, *Odacis* is the proper name of a magistrate in Salacia (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:372; Tolosa and Lloris 2015:252-253; Pappa 2019:80; Faria 1989: 82-83). While the name is likely local in origin, it is written in Latin on the coin and followed by the abbreviation for their position. The ".A" following the name on the real coins signifies the position as an *aedilis*; the ".A.S." signifies *Aedilis Semis* or *Aedilis Salaciensis* (Pappa 2019:80; Ferrer 2018:161). *Aediles* were city magistrates/commissioners in charge of local services such as the police, fire crews, markets, festivals, and games (Whitaker 2007). Based on "the designs used by the mint … the use of the Latin language, and the reference to supposed magistrates," the coin has been dated to around the second and first centuries BCE (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:372). Thus, Fell's (1980:123) claim means the supposed "American version" predates the European one by a hundred or more years, which, of course, makes absolutely no sense as the text references a specific person, holding a specific government position that cannot have been known a century or more before it actually happened.

Fell's translation of the word *Eviom* for the name of the town is also incorrect. The town known later by the Romans as Salacia was never called "Evia," and therefore, *Eviom* cannot be the possessive version of it. In pre-Roman times, the city was typically known as Bevipo, Beuipo, Beuipum, Beuibun, Ketouibon, and Cantnipo (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:372, 392; Mora Serrano 2011; Mora Serrano 2018; Faria 1989; British Museum 2021). Furthermore, on the actual coin type, the name of the town is always written in the local language, an unidentified southwestern script sometimes called 'Tartessian' or 'South Lusitanian' (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:372, 392; Ripollès 2017:5). Not much is known about this language as there are not many known examples; for example, this word is only used as a legend on coins minted in Salacia in the late second and early first centuries BCE (Ripollès 2017:5; Ripollès and Sinner 2019:392). As a result, this word "has been transcribed in diverse ways and has received different names" (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:392). It has been most commonly translated as *Beuipo, beuibun, beuibum,* or abbreviated to *beui*. Once the city was under Roman rule, the town mint "began using Latin to mention magistrates who controlled the issues," as seen on the *Odacis* coins (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:392). The town mint only ever used either the regional southwestern script and/or Latin on their coins; thus, any true replicas would have used these languages.

In fact, the language used on ancient coins in the Iberian Peninsula was highly regional as a result of trade, colonization, and other factors. The southwestern region used a southwestern script or Latin, the southeastern used Punic, the southern middle east coast used Iberian Meridional, the middle east coast used Iberian Levantine, the northern east coast used Greek, and the northern

interior used Celtiberian (Ripollès 2017:5; Domínguez 2006:463). Thus, Greek was only printed on coinage in northern Iberia where the Greek colonies of Rhodes and Emporion were located (Ripollès and Sinner 2019:372-4). Therefore, it makes no sense for a coin crafted by someone from "Evia"/Beuipo to use Iberian-Greek; they would have used their local southwestern script.

All of Fell's claims regarding the "Coin of Evia" are easily disproved. There is no evidence that this object is a coin, that the language is retrograde Iberian-Greek, that the faces depicted on it represent Hercules and Medusa, that the text states "currency of Evia," or that the artifact's makers knew anything about Paleohispanic or ancient Mediterranean history, geography, and culture. A more likely interpretation of the object is that it was made in the late nineteenth or twentieth centuries by someone living in the Newark area as an art project or as a (poor) fake. Given what is known about the context of its discovery, little else can be said.

Sadly, the so-called "Coin of Evia," like the Inscribed Head, the Cooper Stone, and the Johnson Stone, has been lost to history. It is possible that all of these survive in private collections and we hope that someday they might find their way into a museum collection where they can be studied in greater depth and perhaps displayed as are the Keystone and Decalogue Stone. In spite of being transparent frauds, pranks, or misinterpreted art projects, they are part of the histories of science, religion, and politics in America; histories that are still unfolding in the twenty-first century.

Today, accusations of "fake news" and "hoaxes" are part of the contested ground in the middle of debates about the past, the place of science in society, and the use of scientific rationalism in making decisions about our civic future (Bush et al. 2022). It is for those very immediate reasons that we believe a better understanding of long-ago hoaxes, which find currency in contemporary popular debates, serves us all as we look to how we assess extraordinary claims and make democratic choices about public policy.

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